Political Public Relations Strategy of the Indonesian Solidarity Party (PSI) in Riau on 2019 Legislative Election

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Abstract

This research elaborates the political public relations strategy carried out by the novice politicians of the Indonesian Solidarity Party in Riau region on the 2019 Legislative Elections. This research is interesting because the Indonesian Solidarity Party (PSI) is a new party and politicians who participate in political contestations are also novice politicians. This research is a descriptive qualitative research with case study method, data retrieval through the stages of observation, interviews, and documentation. The results of this study reveal that the Political public relations strategy undertaken by PSI politicians is combining image building, political branding and political marketing.

Keywords: *Strategy, Politic, Public Relations*

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Preface

The concept of democracy lies in the fact that supreme power is on people hands. Lincoln defines democracy as a form of government in which supreme political authority and sovereignty are vested in people (Mirriam: 2008). This system, then, generates a concept of General Election in choosing leaders in Indonesia. Furthermore, General Election is described as direct mechanism of choosing members of government in a way that respect the principles of being open, free, and responsible (Act No.7/2007). In April 2019, Indonesia held General Elections whereby the president, the vice president, members of the People's Consultative Assembly, and members of local legislative bodies were elected on the same day. One of the

participants of the election was a new party named the Indonesian Solidarity Party; also known as *Partai Solidaritas Indonesia.* This party was among the other four participants that were participating on the 2019 General Election for the first time. Not only that the party was new, but also the candidates from the party were novice politicians that had never had any involvement on other parties before. As a new comer on the General Election, it was important for PSI to make more efforts so that the party would be able to be recognized and be accepted by electors.

General Election is generally called direct election whereby people are able to use their constitutional right to vote for their representatives, either executive or legislative. In today's Indonesia political world, direct election requires its candidates to spend extra budget in order to be publicly recognized which can result on increasing the chance of winning the election. Furthermore, the extra budget is then used for doing campaign, creating advertisement, paying campaign team, and even paying political consultant. In other words, politicians are forced to create good image, both as an individual and as a team, to obtain public attention. As people take a look at current political situation in Indonesia, it is common to think that good impression is a consequence that should be faced within political contestation in both local and national level.

As talking about political contestation, a candidate has to be able to win public perception or public opinion. A positive perception surely comes from positive image on the candidate. As referred in political public relations definition, a political candidate image is absolutely essential. Whatever the forms are, political public relations are always related to building image. What is portrayed by people about a party and its politicians are the beginning of shaping special image of the party and the politicians. In relating to the afore-mentioned statement, PR activity has been a measurement to obtain public attention which can result on winning the political contestation. As new party with novice politicians, PSI needs public relations activities in form of political marketing and political branding as concrete acts to vote on 2019 general election, not only nationally but also locally. Therefore, it is relevant for this research to elaborate the role of public relation on practical politics.

The research is necessarily conducted since scrutinizing local practical politics is often neglected. Examining practical politics from public relations point of view is interesting since political public relations has practically implemented for long time. However, exploring the matter in scientific study is a new challenge in communications studies research. The long term purpose of the study is to give insight as well as reference on the field of public relations sciences. In practical acts, this research is expected to bring about scientific discourse on political party as well as politicians that public relations are essential in today's political situation.

Research Methods

This research uses case study method. Moreover, case study is research strategy whereby researchers carefully examine a program, a phenomenon, an activity, a process, a

person, and a group. By using this method, the researchers gather complete information using various data collection procedures on determined time (Creswell, 2009). This research is categorized as intrinsic case in which the research is conducted to recognize and to study a case thoroughly. This case demands the researchers to neglect other matters to stay focus so that the researchers are able to bring up new facts in the research (Denzin, 2011). The researchers in this research observed political public relations done by novice politicians of the Indonesian Solidarity Party in Riau on 2019 legislative election. This study is a descriptive qualitative research where researchers elaborate the implementation of political public relations along the 2019 legislative election. Observation was done along pre-campaign period, during campaign period, until post-campaign period. The data were taken by using interviews and documentations during campaign days, Election Day, as well as post-Election Days.

Finding and Discussion

Political Public Relations can be specified as an effort to build good internal and external communication to public within political environment. Political public relations involves components and political resources to process various issues so that they can obtain attentions, it is also done systematically, planned, and directed to achieve mutual understanding among people and to achieve political purposes of certain group (Heryanto, 2012). McNair (2011) divides political public relations into four, including media management. Media management is an activity that is intentionally designed to answer the need and the demand of media. In this context, political public relation maximizes access as well as increases media's reports on particular politicians in without spending any fund. Second activity related to political public relation is image management. This act is necessary to build good image individually, yet it should be in line with the needs of the party where the candidate is involved since party also needs it to also build positive impression. The third political public relation activity deals with internal communication within the party or organization. This activity includes preparing communication channel. This is similar to what has been applied in modern company that regularly supports its internal communication so that the company will be able to run efficiently. The last activity of political public relation is information management. It is indeed essential to manage information so that people will be able to acquire adequate information on politicians and its policies. Information, as a matter of fact, is a crucial weapon in politics to build public opinion and to spread influence (McNair, 2011).

Although political public relations belong to the anatomy of public relations, Stromback and Kiousis (2013) identifies that there are several differences between political public relations and general public relations, namely:

a. Political public relations involves all public relations activities which are conducted by organization or individual to achieve political purposes, including political parties and its politicians, government and public sectors, trade unions, commercial businesses,

special interest groups, and non-profit organization that attempt to influence political processes and political results.

b. Political public relations do not only focus on making effective communications, but also making actions. A politician that is ingenious in building his or her image will not be able to obtain public support for long period if what are described is different from the reality.

c. Political public relations emphasizes on the importance of equal relationship and reputation. In other words, reputation is not an outcome or impact of one hard work. Relationship and reputation work hand in hand in political public relations.

d. Political public relations, in a special case, need an application of traditional public relation, such as publicity and public information though they are considered insubstantial.

Political public relations are not only a matter of whether or not public relations department should be made available by a politician. In addition, it is not a communication consultant that is available only during General Election. Political public relations demands for politician's character and capacity to deal with public needs and being able to build harmonious relationship with stakeholders. Although public relations strategies, techniques, and practices are still needed, yet politicians' integrity becomes the core business in political processes. The measurement of success and "purchasing decision" in political context can be viewed during voting day when the politicians are able to obtain votes, to legitimize, as well as to implement their political decisions.

Based on research findings, there are several strategic steps which were conducted by the Indonesian Solidarity Party in Riau on 2019 legislative elections, including image building, political branding, and political marketing.

1. Image Building

    In political contestation, a candidate has to be able to win public opinion. A positive perception which is portrayed in people's mind will result on politician positive image. Walter Lippmann describes image as "the picture inside our heads". It is indeed in line with management function of political public relations which focus on political purpose stating that a candidate image becomes crucial in political public relations (Stromback, 2013). A politician image that becomes essential preference for the constituents is generally referred into two matters, namely political role and stylistic role. The political role of PSI legislative candidate in Riau is an important appraisal that is related to the quality of the politicians to fulfill public expectations. The candidates' political role in the past, the present, and the future will be a determinant for the constituents' perception. On the other hands, stylistic role does not actually have direct political correlation, yet it gives great contribution in shaping PSI legislative candidates' image in Riau. Stylistic role itself is related to the appearance of PSI legislative candidates so it

will give certain persona (Ilyas, 2010). In this case, political public relations become the key to manage politician's image through strategic communication plans on media and setting agenda.

The image building on 2019 political contestation was also popular on social media. The development of communication technology enables all users to conduct communication across the globe. This became an alternative for PSI in Riau and its politicians to convey their ideology directly to the electors. This condition led to an affordable campaign practices through social media. In addition, it is considered quite effective and efficient in managing political information.

The power of social media in influencing the citizen lies on the social aspect which enables exclusive interaction and participation. It means, opinion can be stated by colleague, friends, or other relation that can consolidate agenda that can either strengthen or weaken opinions (Social Media: The New Power of Political Influence Version 1.O Ari-Matti Auvinen Centre for European Studies).

In a politic era which is dominated by public opinion, image management and representative ability is unavoidably needed. Politicians are expected to be able to persuade and to make engagement to obtain attention. The two ways symmetric communication model is then considered appropriate to accommodate the value of democracy as people are involved in decision making. This model promises an equal and interactive relationship between politicians and people (Indrayani, 2009). A positive image can be built by conducting activities that raised public sympathy toward organization or individual (Farouk, 2014).

2. Political Branding

Political branding etymologically comes from the word "brand". It can be stated that branding is defined as an effort of giving a brand on a product that can give special impression on consumers. Furthermore, branding can be established by giving name, mark, symbol, design, combination, and et cetera that give certain sense of identity. Branding can also be meant as a set of consumers' knowledge on a product or an institution. In political world, branding is always associated with an effort of building image on a party and a candidate. For the researchers, branding means whole political experiences and activities that are packed in structural format so that it can be determined as positive efforts of political organizations and politicians. Political branding is able to build positive perception that can influence people's political creeds and actions. Also, it is related to detailed aspects in relations to political activities. The process of building good political branding should begin with designing appropriate political speeches which should be clear and communicative. By doing so, similar agreements will likely to be achieved whereas misunderstanding can be minimized. In other words, communicators in political branding have to be those who truly understand the characters, the needs, and the wishes of consumers (people). As a result,

it is expected that the branding will not only be a sort of political agenda but will also have value (Wasesa, 2011).

There were five strategic steps of political branding which had been conducted by PSI legislative candidates in Riau on the 2019 Legislative Election. The first one was Brand Awareness whereby the candidates introduced themselves to potential electors. The result of this step was that electors would be aware of the candidates from PSI. The next step was Brand Knowledge. In this step, electors began to have more knowledge and understanding towards PSI legislative candidates. It was expected that people had already realized the existence of PSI legislative candidates as well as had understood their political views and programs. The third was Brand Preference in which electors began to have more positive perception toward PSI legislative candidates compared to others. This step was considered successful indicator of positioning that had been done by PSI candidates earlier. Another step was Brand Liking. In this particular stage, electors had shown their interest to PSI legislative candidates in Riau and were willing to vote for them on the Election Day. As the legislative candidates came into this step, he or she was successfully entered the first safe area. However, the feeling of liking could still be affected, even be changed, in the near future. The last step was Brand Loyalty whereby the electors had shown a sign of loyalty on the candidates. In addition, the electors had already had strong confidence in supporting and choosing the candidates and had willingly chosen to neglect others. Unfortunately, PSI legislative candidates in Riau had not been able to enter this step.

3. The Implementation of Political Marketing

Marketing is a concept that connects producers and consumers. Bagozzi (1975) describes marketing as a process that allows exchange between two parties or more. The concept itself is commonly connected to profitable businesses, yet it is recently used in social institutions and even politics. In fact, political marketing is usually compared to business marketing. As business marketing is about producers providing services and building good communication in exchange of profit or financial benefits, political marketing is about politicians doing campaigns, giving promises, showing merits, giving promising policies, as well as making contribution in exchange of positive image to assure electors to vote them (Kotler, 2010). Marketing surely has critical role for political institutions. The purpose of political marketing is to support political parties and its candidates to be well-known. It also takes role as a bridge between candidates and their programs that are specifically designed to be able to communicate well. Furthermore, political marketing ease the candidates to be so close to electors that it is able to influence their behavior (Buttler and Collins). All in all, political marketing is indeed important matter to consider (Firmanzah, 2008)

Political marketing in its practices has always based on two points, namely structure and process. The structure of political marketing includes products, organization, and

markets. Process in this case refers to person/ideology. Furthermore, the person/ideology is connected to competencies, records, and future plans. A candidate with certain ideology can actually bring great influence to electors. This is clear as current electors have been exposed by tremendous information about the candidates. By upbringing new name along with guarantee that the party is not a "fake" nor a "junk", PSI assures that their candidates is qualified, well-chosen, has strong and positive characters, as well as passion to be the member of house of representatives.

The other point to note is organization. It can be views as political vehicle for candidates of house of representative. Thus, the candidates have to comprehend the background of the organization well. For PSI in Riau, the recruitment and appointment system is essential step to be conducted before making sure that a particular person is qualified enough to be the candidates of legislative counsils. The tight political contestation demands candidates that understand the political market. This comprehension includes rules and limitations, social affirmation and ideology, and the heterogeneous consumers. Moreover, the candidates have to fully comprehend rules, limitations, and laws that regulate the election mechanism; candidate's requirements, advertising rules, campaigns, and so forth. Social affirmation and ideology can be portrayed during voting day. The General Election is indeed about various people opinions and expression, whereas their vote is a thing to strengthen their social position and ideology. As the consequence of heterogeneous voters, the producers (PSI candidates of legislative councils) have to comprehend the election and its procedure so that strategic plans will be able to be applied well.

Political marketing actually has wide coverage that the concept cannot be limited merely in the application. It should also reach political culture, education, economic condition, and other crucial issues that may affect political perception. In marketing activity, the message from PSI legislative candidates should be organized in such a way that is interesting. The voters may only be given one-sided information so that the political purposes can be achieved. In its application, PSI legislative candidates had to show interesting appearance and remarkable performance. Thus, PSI in Riau had given its candidates set of information on issues and problems of Riau. Besides, communication ability becomes an important point to master so dyadic communication runs well. PSI in Riau also considered the role of social media, both mass media and social media. As a matter of fact, media functions as source of political information and political education. If media fails to provide appropriate information for PSI legislative candidate, then the chance of winning the legislative election decreases. Therefore, PSI cooperated with media to synchronize the perspective, even to decide the format of political speech.

All in all, the implementation of political marketing has been undertaken thoroughly. It means that the political marketing has been implemented in detailed and in structured as a way to deal with competition. PSI Riau believes that the application of political

marketing will directly influence the image branding of the party and its candidates. In addition, it will also be long-term investment for PSI. Basically, the existence of a party and its candidates will be affected by the success rate of the political marketing application. As the political contestation becomes tighter, PSI Riau political marketing is strengthen by branding concept. The branding itself tries to give special characteristic on political icon. Additionally, the brand can be associated with names, symbols, logos, or the combination of the former. Also, the purpose of branding is a particular position in political market.

Conclusion

Political public relations activities are strategic steps that can provide direct influence during General Election. Indeed, it is conducted to shape positive public perception on both the party and the candidates. Politicians of the Indonesian Solidarity Part in Riau understand that this step has to be conducted since PSI is a new political party which consists of novice politicians. The step that had been done by PSI was building the image of legislative candidates by dyadic communication with the people. Then, PSI Riau set political branding combined with political marketing. Those political public relations were conducted by maximizing the socialization then making campaigns through social media.

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